

MEETING MINUTES • OCTOBER 11, 2011  
ACTON HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

RECEIVED  
NOV - 3 2011  
TOWN CLERK, ACTON

*The Meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM by Chair, Kathy Acerbo-Bachman (KAB).*

*Also present were members Anita Rogers (AR), Pam Lynn (PL), David Honn (DH), ), Board of Selectmen Liaison Mike Gowing (MG), and Ron Rose (RR). Michaela Moran (MM) arrived later.*

7:30pm Citizens' Concerns: There were no citizen's concerns.

7:35pm: There were no minutes to approve.

With time available prior to the next agenda item, KAB noted that in regard to Application No. 1156, any approval as appropriate of exposed heat pumps with exposed refrigerant lines would be a precedent in an Acton Historic District. Exposed heat pump installations have not been legally approved in the Districts. This application will determine if such installations as a class are detrimental to the Districts when visible in locations under the Commission's jurisdiction and are never to be approved as acceptable.

7:45pm: 90 School Street Demolition

KAB noted that HDC member Michaela Moran is an abutter, and is not present at the meeting. KAB is also an abutter and recused herself. However, because of the lack of a quorum following her recusal due to the concurrent absence of member David Barrat, she invoked "the RULE OF NECESSITY" and rejoined the meeting to form a quorum in order to discuss the item as a HDC public meeting before the Historic Commission's public hearing on the demolition, which is to occur in less than 24 hours.

KAB noted that for some unknown reason the parcel on which this house is located is omitted from the South Acton Historic District. The Historic Commission Public Hearing for the demolition is at their meeting on October 12th.

AR volunteered to go to their meeting and speak on behalf of the HDC.

The HDC will request a 6 month delay of the demolition in order to explore alternates that would save and improve the existing house. Points to be made are to include.

- For some inexplicable reason, this parcel and house has been omitted from the South Acton Historic District even though they are within the district.
- The HDC is planning to submit a proposal to CPC for a grant program to assist homeowners such as these.
- The owners are not financially capable of maintaining this property, yet can tear this down in order to purchase another house.
- CPC funds to aid in the restoration of the current house could make retaining and adding to it attractive to a developer, if this is the situation.

8:00pm: Application No. 1128 - OMR design for an arched canopy at exterior steps and etc. for WAVE.

*Present for OMR were Mathias Rosenfeld and Javier Ramirez!*

KAB recommends that OMR present items according to their priority because of the limited time available for tonight's appointment.

Item 1: Light Fixture at 537 Massachusetts Ave directory sign.

The OMR representatives requested that the light fixture for the sign at the 537 Mass Ave directory sign be a single-headed fixture with a more powerful lamp in place of the double headed fixture previously approved fixture. It would be a similar fixture from the same manufacturer previously approved. All HDC members present found this acceptable.

*Member Michaela Moran (MM) arrives at the meeting and joins the quorum at 8:15PM.*

Item 2: New canopy at existing steps from the lawn area at 543/544 Mass Ave to the rear parking. OMR presented four options with varying radii for the arch and various configurations of the steel tube post and flat arch based on feedback from the HDC at the previous meeting.

AR: Prefers Option "C" having steel posts rising from the railing below, continuously joined with a steel tube flat-arch with purlins supporting a rolled steel-plate with copper roofing. Notes that lighting is similar to that just approved for the sign at the adjacent property.

PL: Also finds the shape and arrangement of "C" good.

KAB: C is acceptable but would require a vine element growing on it so that the structure is tied to the garden. Alternatives such as a honeysuckle *sweet sue* can be suggested.

RR: Noted that he found the original OMR proposal for the structure attractive because of its essential, minimal character and structural purity. Also noted that precedent for a flat arch does exist in the district at 552 Mass Ave across the street.

DH: Finds that on this rare occasion he agrees with RR. He suggests up lighting to illuminate the structure and provide indirect illumination for the sign and path. *OMR has concerns about spill light.*

AR: Asks which of the options OMR prefers. OMR now prefers "C".

RR: If OMR prefers "C" it is fine with him. Suggest eliminating purlins and using standoffs supporting rolled plate in their place and that current light fixtures detract from design.

DH, AR & RR discuss standoffs, substitution of strip lights in rolled channels at top of signs.

MM: Asks for clarification of attachment method.

HDC members gathered around DH as he sketched a revised option, identified as "E", which has continuous post and flat-arch steel tube "wicker" frames with standoffs of 1" to 1-1/2" supporting the rolled steel plate roof with copper roofing. Lighting is continuous strips in channels at both sides the curved tops of the signs which are also to be supported on standoffs at the steel tube posts. The flat arches at Option "E" are to have radii similar to Option "C".

A Motion to approve Option "E" as appropriate was proposed by ??? and seconded By ???

The Motion passed unanimously.

Item 3: New canopy at existing steps from the lawn area at 543/544 Mass Ave to the rear parking. In the limited time remaining, OMR presented options for an awing at the west side of 544 Mass Ave above the array of French doors and sidelites at the dining terrace for the Twin Seafood restaurant. Options included a large retractable awning and narrow fixed awnings. DH & RR preferred the retractable awning, although OMR said cost could be a concern. DH thought umbrellas could be more "fun".

8:30pm: Application No.1156 - 554 Massachusetts Ave Heat Pumps

*The owner/applicants Joe & Lucille Pitta were present.*

KAB discussed the 60 time limit set out in the HDC by-law and noted that the HDC would need to vote after the conclusion of the Public Hearing for the application on October 25th or the applicants would need to request an extension to allow the HDC to vote at the following meeting on November.

KAB noted that because an exterior heat pump system with refrigerant lines attached to the outside of a building has never been legally installed in an Acton historic district, this is an important precedent.

The applicants responded that because the heat pump system is required to heat the residence during the winter season, they would not request an extension. Joe Pitta stated that he has seen 16 properties in districts where these installations exist, including one or two buildings owned by the town.

KAB noted that not all of these might be under the HDC's jurisdiction (because of their location on the property or the arrangement of the installation). It was also noted that other installations in the immediate vicinity of this application have been discussed at an earlier HDC meeting.

MM, the HDC liaison for the application noted a site meeting attended by three members (DH, AR & RR) reviewed the installation with the applicants and the system installer. MM said that she was briefly at the site but left on the arrival of a fourth member to avoid a quorum during discussions of the installation design at the site.

DH summarized the installation arrangement devised at the site meeting. It will consist of two units, one each at the east and west sides of the building. The compressor unit on the west side is located well behind an existing picket fence measuring 43" in height. It is 48" in height (including space below above snowfall) and supported against the exterior wall below a window. The refrigerant/drain/control lines will be behind a cover (+/- 2"x3") running laterally at the clapboards just above the skirt board between the unit and an existing deck, and then penetrate the wall to an interior chase below the 1st floor level. The cover will be painted to match the clapboards. It is possible to plant substantial shrubs behind the fence and in front of the installation to screen it entirely from the public way. The compressor unit at the east side of the building will be located at an inside corner behind low clapboard "bump-out" screening it from visibility from Mass Ave (the public way identified for HDC jurisdiction). An existing board fence also hides the unit from view at the side street Kinsley Road. The covered mechanical lines will run vertically at the inside corner behind the bump-out. At its roof line there will be a "T", with one branch running vertically to penetrate the wall at a 2nd floor bedroom. This will be painted to match the clapboards. The second branch will run laterally at the inside "L" of the wall just above the bump-out roof line, and then vertically up the south wall to the roof eave (all concealed from the public way). From this point the line will be located under the soffit at the eave and run to the front of the house where it will descend over the clapboards adjacent to electrical and cable lines over the clapboards to the point where it will penetrate to the interior fan unit. A condensation line will run from this penetration to the ground, again adjacent to electrical and cable lines. This installation will have a relatively minor impact on the building's appearance.

The installers updated diagram of lines overlaid photographs has some discrepancies with the design agreed to at the site and needs to be corrected to depict the design.

MM expressed appreciation for both the fabulous job of hiding and minimizing the impact of piping, and for the applicants continued commitment to and diligence in working with the HDC.

DH raised questions about code required separation between existing surface mounted electrical conduit and the new surface mounted hvac lines.

KAB praised the vastly improved design and stated that the applicant needs to provide updated documents for the public hearing, best to be provided before October 18th.

#### 9:00PM Application No.1157 Town of Acton Veteran's Memorial

*Present for the present the application was John Murray and for the public to W. Arthur Gagne & Charlie Aronson.*

HDC liaison PL introduced the application noting that although the schedule seems compressed this is actually the culmination of 6 years of work. The extraordinary stone has only recently become available and there has been a great effort to contact all Acton Veterans in order to present the concept to them and enlist their participation in its development. The work will require further development in design of the base,

landscaping and lighting. The effort tonight is intended to get the HDC's opinions and input in order to bring a more developed proposal before the Board of Selectmen at their meeting on October 17th. The intention is to have a monument in to be dedicated on Acton Common on Armistice Day next month, because it is the 11th day of the 11th month of 2011(11-11-11). Approval of the HDC would have to come at its October 25th meeting.

John Murray, Collector/town treasurer made a presentation for the Town (applicant).

The proposed location of the memorial is the eastern apex of the triangular portion of the Common (between the fire station and church) which is now the site of the obelisk, cannon and the Spanish-American war memorial stone which would have to be relocated. This relocation would possibly be to a number of locations, one of which would requiring the cutting of a mature cherry tree in front of the Town Hall. The WWII/Korean/Vietnam Memorial is to the south of Town Hall and (Civil War) Memorial Library is to the north.

The stone proposed for the memorial is a very large irregular block of granite. It has very powerful marks of drilling, cutting and splitting on its various surfaces. It's angled front surface would have an inscription and insignia of the various Armed Services assembled in an oval about the U.S. Eagle, a side surface would have a bronze dedication plaque, the rear would have a relief carved eagle created by a local artist. Another end, currently having cracks thought to be unrepairable, would be split off. The inscription was prepared with the input of over 100 veterans. Other curb and sidewalk improvements would be undertaken in conjunction with the installation of the Veteran's Memorial. A portable ramp and step assembly that allows the memorial to "function" as a speaker's podium.

Photographs of the stone and documentation of proposed location, inscription, plaque, base, artwork, and associated site improvements are included in the pdf of the PowerPoint presentation for the memorial in DocuShare on the Town website.

HDC members response to the presentation:

MM expressed concerns about the setting of the Memorial.

PL expressed concern about the wording of the inscription. The inscription could more succinctly express the sentiment that the veterans hope to be expressed, and be more thoughtfully composed.

RR felt the stone itself was a very powerful artifact and appropriate memorial but was cluttered and overburdened with too many applied elements lacking in elegance.

DH felt that the oval of the proposed relief artwork of the eagle on rather too completely effaced the horizontal striations creating the continuous texture of the stones surface. The striations could be subtly carried into the carving as a backdrop for the relief carving to create a greater sense of continuity of surface and to make the carved artwork appear more intrinsic to the stone.

PL expressed her worry about the HDC's response to the character of the stone itself, but was gratified at the positive opinions.

John Murray expressed the importance of the content of the inscription to the veterans who created it, and the sense of a letter of appreciation from the people of the town they wanted it to convey.

RR questioned the Dean Charter's (Town Tree Warden) evaluation of the condition and value of the two cherry trees flanking the front of the Town Hall as being at the end of their lifespan and could be replaced. It is evident that they could remain an important asset for a long time. Another location for the Spanish American War Memorial would be better.

HDC input also included:

- The inscription should be condensed, simplified, improved grammatically.
- The bronze dedication plaque affixed to the end of the stone detracts from the power and elegance of the monument and should be installed in the ground away from the stone or eliminated.
- The base of the stone should be a ground surface of crushed stone and not another stone or concrete surface.
- The front side artwork detracts from the character of the stone and clutters the surface in conflict with the inscription. The oval, stars and eagle emblem should be eliminated, and the insignia of the services arrayed vertically along one surface adjacent to the inscription.
- The cracked section of the stone should not be split off, but should be visibly mended as an intrinsic element of the memorial.

The Town working group developing the design will work to accommodate the input of the HDC.

PL will work with her faculty at ABRHS and HDC members to assemble suggestions and prepare options to improve the inscription, in time to allow for the October 17th presentation to the BoS.

Meeting adjourned at 9:45 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Ronald Rose